

Halo: The Plague

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Summary: Chief has been found. A new semi-sentient parasite is passing through the universe, posing yet another threat to humanity. With Spartan numbers on the rise, will humanity be saved? Rated M for blood, gore, and violence.

1. The Mission

Sarah groaned softly, feeling consciousness trickle slowly in. '_Cryo... I was in cryo, right?_' She slowly felt sleep lift from her like a heavy blanket. She opened her eyes... tried to. They wouldn't open. She felt a feeling rise in her that she knew would be the death of her someday. Panic. She tried to lift her arms. No response. She strained at her muscles, her body feeling heavy as though an Albatross had set down on her.

Nothing.

Now the panic was getting to her, feeling her heartbeat rise. "S2-1, please stop struggling. I use NI2 on you, to reduce risk of you moving. Stressing too much can result in permanent damage."

Sarah did as told. She usually followed orders without question, even when it was natural to be disobedient, when she was younger. '_Maybe because of who my parents were...?_' She was most likely right. Her father had been the legendary John SPARTAN-117. No one knew how he had successfully impregnated her mother, a First Lieutenant Marissa Shannok. Sarah had been just like her father when younger - she was tough, never took 'no' for a real answer, and always won. Always. She remembered her mother. She'd been tall, lean, her hair never past her jaw line. Her eyes had been the most intense, odd color of green. They had been an ashen forest color - a pale green-tinted gray. Sarah's eyes had come out strange, one her mother's color, the other her father's, which was a deep chocolate-y brown.

Suddenly, she snapped back into the present. '_They used WHAT on me? NI2... Fuck. Them._'

Neural Inhibitor II. Taken from the Neural Inhibitor Collar technology that had been set aside, it was a little plaque set on the spine between the top of the shoulder blades. Two little barbs slid into the skin and touched the spinal cord, not causing any damage but nullifying any neural pulses sent down that weren't necessary for life. Breathing, heart beating, everything involuntary still happened. But everything one told their body to do didn't.

Sarah felt something pull from her neck, and suddenly, she could move. Her eyes snapped open. Color, image, vision flooded back and left her with a split-second headache. She clenched her fists to keep her temper in check. "NI2. What'd you use that for?"

Her voice was cold and sharp. Marissa's had been the same. People feared her when she got mad, as she wasn't afraid to break a nose or an arm. Also and this was the main reason: she was a SPARTAN. She wasn't a series II, or the cannon-fodder III. She was just as good as her father, but no other child had gone through the brutal training with her. Now she was fifteen. The training wasn't over, not by a long shot, but it was getting easier. Actually, it was getting tougher, but she had quick wit and inexhaustible luck. She adapted quickly. She knew how to use almost every weapon she could get her hands on, but she preferred to use her fists.

Her question was avoided. "Alright, Sarah. Stand up, please."

Sarah sat up first, then pushed herself off the table. She stood a good ten inches taller than the technician, but possibly three inches smaller than the other man there. She stared at him in interest, especially since his eyes remained on her face. Most other males that saw her like this let their eyes wander her naked form. _A stranger? That's... new._

The stranger was definitely taller than herself, his hair a shockingly-bright red, sheared close to his scalp, his blue eyes a stark contrast and very sharp, missing nothing. He looked uncomfortable standing there, and even worse, like a civvie. "You weren't kidding, Gun. She really does have a nice body. Thing, strong, yet retaining her feminine shape..."

Sarah narrowed her eyes, glaring at the stranger. He was talking as if she wasn't standing right there in front of them. She didn't like that. "You are...?"

Due to his civilian attire, she didn't put nearly as much respect as she would've if he was an unknown officer. He smiled, flashing straight white teeth, one of his front teeth having a point created by a chip. "Lieutenant Michael Connors."

Sarah stiffened at her mistake, and snapped a crisp salute. Lieutenant Connors smiled again, and returned a respectful two-fingered salute. "At ease, SPARTAN."

She relaxed, looking at him. Jeffery 'Gun' Michaelson turned to him. "Well, Lieutenant, this is the SPARTAN you wanted to see..."

The Lieutenant waved his hand dismissively, and the technician turned and walked away. "Do you have a designation, SPARTAN?"

"S2-1, sir!"

The Lieutenant paused, almost unnoticeably, then nodded. "Do you mind if I call you by your proper name, S2-1?"

Sarah paused, and gave him a look. "Yes, sir. I do mind."

Connors looked in her eyes, something almost no one did, then nodded. "Very well. Then listen, S2-1. In 2553, a Forerunner structure called The Ark was used to fire a Halo Ring, the fourth installation of the 'series', the end the Human-Covenant War. We all but succeeded, as the forces are regaining in number. The Master Chief, the SPARTAN responsible for making that possible, held a valuable construct, the AI Cortana. We presumed the Chief and AI dead, as only half of the ship crashed down, and only the Arbiter came out. But at 1500 hours yesterday, we received a weak signal. They're out there, most likely alive, trillions of miles away near a planet designated as Sigma 7."

He turned to her, having noticed her stiffen when he said they'd presumed the other SPARTAN dead. "I want you to come with me to go find him."

Sarah blinked, looking down, then snapped a salute so hard and fast it hurt. "Sir, yes, sir!"

Relief and sorrow washed over her, but she bottled them up and pocketed them for later. Connors watched her, and nodded. "Grab your gear and meet me in the hangar at 1700 hours."

She nodded again. That gave her two hours. The Lieutenant turned, looked at her, then walked out. She turned and walked over to the case they held her armor in, and started suiting up. She sighed once covered in the MJOLNIR Mark VII-A armor. She was fine being naked, but she felt so vulnerable. Plus, with the armor, she could contact her 'friend'. "Nylun."

Silence for a few moments, then, "I'm here, Lieutenant Junior Grade."

"Please, Nylun, I've told you not to address me by my rank... Anywho, can you contact Sergeant Lucas Johnson and tell him to meet me in the hangar at 1700 hours?"

"Yes, ma'am. May I myself ask for the specifics of your mission? Or must I listen in on the COs?"

Sarah smirked. The ever-curious Nylun, at it again. "I'll tell you if you come along with us."

Nylun considered this for a few seconds. "Fine. Give me a few minutes to dump myself in the chip and get myself to you."

"Alright. See you in a bit."

Connors sighed deeply, walking back toward his quarters. He passed a group of NCOs, who were chattering nervously, and he picked up one word of interest. 'Sangheili'. _Here? In this sector? Or on this ship...?_ He quickened his pace, going to the bridge instead. The doors slid open silently, and he paused. All of the bridge crew, who

would normally be talking to each other, sharing information on keeping the Injustice on track, were silent. It was as if someone had a gun to each of their heads. He walked in further, and saw why. Two aliens were standing up with the Captain, one with arms cross and elongated head lowered, the other with arms hanging and head up more. The one with its head bent wore white or silver armor, angular yet smooth and curvy, very imposing. Turning its head revealed it was missing the majority of its left mandibles.

Its partner bore bright violet armor, again angular yet curvy, yet curvier and with more flare than the other. A great dark mauve cloak sat about its shoulders. It was slightly taller than the silver-clad beast, and its deep voice could be heard across the bridge, which was not a small feat. It spoke Human flawlessly...

"... revealed that you're headed to these coordinates, which can only be reached by a ship with your 'Shaw-Fujikiwa' technologies... but you don't want to risk this... Injustice of yours, even though what you're after is worth a hundred vessels."

The Captain, Captain Johnathan Redea, frowned, his brow creasing beneath salt-and-pepper hair. "I never said he was worth a hundred vessels. Maybe ten. He's not that rare anymore. Sure he has every medal known, and has killed more Covenant than any other. But he's replaceable. They're all replaceable."

The purple-clad Sangheili snarled. "Lives are not replaceable, human. Is he not human, as well? Surely he does not think the same. If you wore his armor, would you not want to continue fighting for the glory and salvation of your race?"

"SPARTANS are cannon-fodder, Supreme Commander. We made them for morale and to put out on suicide missions so we wouldn't have to lose fifty lives where one would suffice. I-."

"SPARTANS are not cannon-fodder, Captain, sir," Connors interjected, fists clenched, jaw set, and eyes ablaze. "They were created for morale and the harder, more impossible missions. But not to throw away needlessly. With all the money and time we put into the II's, we can not just throw 117 out the chute like he's nothing. His reputation deems him invaluable."

Redea looked at Connors, and narrowed his eyes. "Lieutenant Connors. I think this is the first time you've talked against me. Why is that? What makes you care so much for these SPARTANS?"

Connors opened his mouth to talk, then stopped, and made himself think. "I'm not thinking of them as merely SPARTANS, sir. They're still human, no matter how many cybernetic augmentations we do on them. The only way to make a SPARTAN no longer human would be to make them fully robotic. We're still rebuilding from the Covenant's devastation to our race. Every. Human. Matters."

Redea clasped his hands behind his back. That he could not argue against. "No matter. Go after one, go after both, it makes no noticeable distance to me. As long as you don't risk Cortana in trying to receive the Chief, retrieving him will be fine. But my point still stands. I don't want to risk the Injustice for him. What if the Jiralhanae are there? Or maybe even Flood?"

The purple-clad Sangheili snorted softly, rolling his soft brown eyes. "We are willing to offer our ship to go. We have a better Slip-space system, better weapons, and better defense. Plus, the _Haven of Souls_ is bigger than your _Injustice_, and thus carries more warriors. Sending your little group with us would be the best choice."

The Captain nodded, calmed down from his earlier rant. "Lieutenant Michael Connors, this is Shipmaster Rtas 'Vadum and Supreme Commander Thel 'Vadam." He turned to the Lieutenant. "You caught everything. Gather your team, brief them, meet these two in the hangar to be transported to their Carrier."

Connors saluted crisply. "Sir, yes, sir!"

Redea nodded. "Good man. Dismissed."

Connors saluted, turned, and walked out.

1700 hours...

Sarah walked toward the hangar, then sighed and chuckled once. "As I have said _countless_ times in the past, Nuke, you can't sneak up on me!"

She looked where she thought he'd be, and frowned, seeing nothing. She felt something hit her shoulder, and she whirled and tackled, hand up and ready to punch. The good-looking black man beneath her hooted and hollered in triumph, looking happier than ever. "WHOO! I did it! I _finally_ did it! YEAH!"

Sarah growled and pushed him back down as he started getting up. "Nuke, you _really_ suck. You're lucky I know how to hold myself back instead of instantly striking..."

Lucas 'Nuke' Johnson kept laughing, flashing his charming white smile, slowly getting up. "Oh, calm down, don't get your panties in a bunch. Now that I've done it, I won't do it again."

Sarah sighed, fisting her hands, then grabbed her duffel and started walking. Nuke quieted instantly. A silent Sarah was not good. "Oh, come on Sarah... don't be silent, please..."

She made no response. She saw something shimmer in her peripheral vision, and frowned, slinging her duffel bag on her shoulder. Then, in a flash, she drew her pistol and jabbed it at the bottom jaw of the cloaked being in the shadows. She heard a deep throaty chuckle, and blinked in surprise when the figure uncloaked itself, revealing a being she'd never personally seen. "Well done, SPARTAN. I don't think your human partner realized I was here," Rtas added at seeing Nuke's shocked expression. He reached up, and gently lowered her hand with the pistol. "I'm no threat, SPARTAN. I was told to try and locate you so we can leave."

Sarah frowned, tucking the pistol in its holster. "It's not quite 1700 hours..."

Rtas tipped his head and clacked his mandibles, his sharp off-white teeth gleaming, the wound on the left side of his head rather distracting. "Plans have been changed," he said with a smooth growl,

his green eyes seeming to look right into her heterochromials through the polarized faceplate. "Please. Follow me."

He turned and started walking, his four-digitated hands clenched, clacking his mandibles again. She watched him walk, the slow, almost-graceful sloop of each step, his hooves rather loud on the metal flooring. She looked ahead, seeing Lieutenant Connors conversing with another, Thel, in front of a strange craft. She saluted upon reaching them. "At ease."

She dropped her arm, looking at Thel in his gaudy armor and cloak. She then looked at Connors. "May I ask about the change of plans, sir?"

"Taking the path of least resistance. S2-1, this is Supreme Commander Thel 'Vadam and Shipmaster Rtas 'Vadum."

Sarah took Thel's large claw, shaking it. She then looked at the craft. Connors felt a smirk tug at his lips, looking at her - he knew under that helmet she was arching a brow quite high. "It's a Phantom, Lieutenant. Covenant Spacecraft. The Sangheili split from them years ago, but still use some of the ones they confiscated."

Sarah nodded, and shifted her duffel on her shoulder. Thel caught the action, and nodded, moving his mandibles in a way that passed as a smile once he caught sight of Nuke's uneasy look. "Shall we depart, humans, SPARTAN?"

They all nodded, and boarded the craft. Moments after Sarah disappeared, the Phantom took off, and coasted out toward the _Haven of Souls._

Thel walked over toward Sarah, his shoulders rid of the cloak. "So, SPARTAN... Are you coming on this mission merely because he is your father?"

Sarah stiffened, and turned her helmet toward him. "How do you know that?"

Thel gave what passed as a smile again. "Everyone has a scent all their own, but immediate family share it. You share his. So you're either his mother, his lover, or an offspring. I'm going to guess offspring."

Sarah blinked, then cleared her throat and nodded softly. "Yes, I'm his daughter. His only child that should not be..."

Thel nodded, a soft, not-angry growl of thought rumbling from his throat. She sighed, and stared at his head for a little while, then turned her gaze down. She reached up, and plugged Nylun's chip in, wincing at the feeling. She flicked her external speakers off before he spoke. "That's better... Could've plugged me in a little sooner."

"Oh, hush. Be glad I plugged you in at all."

She blinked when Thel's claw lightly touched her faceplate. She rerouted power to the speakers. "Yes, sir?"

"You have not been briefed of the whole situation. Would you like me

to tell you and the human?"

Nuke looked up, finding himself uncomfortable in the quiet he'd put himself in. "I dunno 'bout her, but I'd definitely like to know what hell hole I'm about to jump into this time."

Sarah nodded. "Yes, sir, if you can, brief us."

Thel nodded. "Very well. The SPARTAN and construct are on the frigate Forward Unto Dawn... the half that remains there, anyway. We are to go in, and locate them. Our highest priority is to get that construct, Cortana. Your Captain said that the SPARTAN is only a minority... and does not have to be retrieved."

Sarah stood there, silent, her fists clenched. Nuke took a step back. "Good job, split-lip... You got her pissed."

Thel tilted his head, and even his purple blood chilled at her voice when she spoke. "We will get him back. He is the priority. We will search that ship and find him if it's the last thing we do."

2. Introducing: The Plague

Sarah dropped down to the swirling purple metal of the Haven of Soul's floors. It made her dizzy. The walls were a solid purple, so she looked at them instead, until everyone else was down. Thel came up and placed his claw on her shoulder. "We will get your father back. I'll see to it."

Sarah let a small smile tug at her lips, and she looked at the claw on her shoulder before it slid away. "Are you really going to risk their lives to find your father, Sarah?"

She scowled. "Nylun... You wouldn't understand."

Nylun processed a sigh. "No, I suppose I wouldn't, would I?"

"No..." She snatched her duffel as Nuke kicked it down, hooking it on her shoulder. "You would have to be human to understand."

Nylun processed a frown, feeling a little hurt. Sarah wasn't normally this harsh. Then again, the missions weren't normally this personal. "Right. Well, you should get some rest, calm down. Anger causes sloppiness, and we don't need any of that."

Sarah sighed, and nodded. "Right..."

She turned to Rtas. "Rtas, is there anywhere I could go to get some rest?"

Rtas looked at her, and clicked a mandible quietly, then barked at a minor Sangheili that had previously been peering at the SPARTAN and humans in curiosity. He grumbled at the minor in their own language, gesturing both his head and a claw in Sarah's direction. The minor looked at her, clicking his own mandibles, then made a sound like 'rrff' and jerked his head backward, walking toward one of the doors in the corner. Rtas looked to her. "Rethan will take you to the quarters. I hope they'll serve for rest; they're made for Sangheili."

If needed, I'll send some other Sangheili as well as some Huragok to make it more suitable for you."

Sarah nodded. "Thank you very much, Shipmaster."

Rtas nodded his noble head. "No need for thanks, Spartan. Try to get as much rest as possible. Someone will come wake you when we arrive."

Sarah nodded again, then followed Rethan, who was waiting patiently and quietly by the door. He continued walking once she caught up. His brown eyes were on her the whole time, and finally, she made it end. "Do you have something to say, Sangheili? Or is it a custom for your kind to stare at others?"

Rethan growled lowly. "You killed my Uncle."

Sarah shook her head. "I'm sorry for the loss of your uncle, Rethan. But I did not kill him. I have never engaged your race."

Rethan looked at her, then looked ahead. They went up a few levels, Sarah looking around in interest, especially at the other races on the ship. There were some Unggoy, or Grunts; and Huragok, or Engineers. She liked the Huragok. Especially the one that started following them. She tried to pay it no heed, but it waving its tentacles in her peripheral vision obviously meant it wanted something. She turned around, looking at it. "What do you want?" she asked softly, watching its eel-looking head slither out and look at her. It wrapped its tentacles around her one arm, trilling softly and tilting its head. Rethan huffed. "Huragok are naturally affectionate. The Jiralhenae mistreat them and enslave them. Theirs wish to leave. We have given the Huragok here the option, but they stay. They are very smart creatures, but they cannot talk."

Sarah clicked her tongue against her teeth. "That's a shame. I was going to ask it so many questions." She had a sarcastic tone to her voice, but by the way Rethan rolled his eyes, she assumed sarcasm was lost on him.

"Can they understand?"

That paused Rethan, and he blinked, then looked at her. "I do not know. I'd assume so."

Sarah looked at the 'room' he stopped in front of. "These are to be your quarters for the flight, Spartan."

She nodded again. "Thank you, Rethan."

She walked into the quarters, then looked at the bunk. It was slightly concave, and circular. She arched a brow. "I could get used to that, I think..."

* * *

><p>Lucas Johnson walked up behind Thel, who had called him to the Bridge. It wasn't his ship, but he still held the power. "What'd you want?"<p>

Thel turned around, giving him a look. "Strange. Being one of a

military descent and in the Force yourself, I would have figured a more... respectful, approach to asking me that."

Nuke rolled his eyes, then snapped straight and shot his hand to his forehead. "Reporting as called, sir! May I ask why you called me, sir?"

Thel chuckled. "That's better. At ease. I called you here because I know you're close to the Spartan. I wish to know more about her."

Nuke got a look to his face, and his eyes glinted softly. "What do you want to know?"

"I want to know how she fights, how loyal she is, how protective she is. Everything I would need to know about her to make this mission as easy as possible."

Nuke scoffed. "This mission will be far from easy, no matter how much you know about everyone. But I can try to answer any questions you may have about her."

Thel looked at him, and huffed softly. "Will she be a liability? Will her wanting to save her father make her a hazard to have on the mission?"

That was a question Lucas hadn't been expecting. He stood there and thought on it for a long time, then nodded. "I actually think she will... If there's a team. If... If she's sent out on her own, however, with... opportunities for reinforcements if needed... I'm sure she could do her absolute best and not jeopardize anything."

There were a few moments of silence as the Sangheili thought about it, his eyes closed. Then he nodded. "That sounds like a sounder plan than the one I had in mind." A pause. "How good of a fighter is she, Sergeant?"

"Very, sir. One of the best I've ever seen, second only to the reports of her father."

More quiet moments. "How does she work best? In a team, or on her own?"

"Mostly, on her own. If sniping, though, she won't work with less than three."

"Three? Why three?"

Nuke sighed. "It was a training exercise. Most... Most people still do not like Spartans, and the leader really didn't, so he decided to not play fair. His group was supposed to stay on the one side of the arena, but he had a few men circle around back as she was taking care of the others with rubber bullets. She was on a 'cliff' high enough that it would injure her if she fell... and that's exactly what they wanted. She didn't realize someone was there until her spotter was thrown off and she was pushed. She reflexively whirled and grabbed the guy who shoved her, and they both went over, and she ended up landing on him."

Thel listened quietly. "And the man whom she landed on?"

"Lost a leg and an eye, and the use of one of his hands."

"And the Spartan?"

"The way she landed popped her left arm out of socket. They got it back in quick enough, but it gave her trouble for a while anyway."

The Elite nodded, and looked at him. "Thank you for the information, Sergeant. You're free to leave."

Lucas nodded, then turned and left the bridge, getting led to where he'd be sleeping during the trip as well.

* * *

><p>Sarah woke up early. There was still a few hours until they reached their destination, but a horrible dream had woken her. It was a simple one: They'd gotten to the ship, and there was nothing there. No Spartan, no AI, nothing. Then, to make dream matters worse, Thel had said they would not look around nearby areas, and left.<p>

"Won't let that happen... He /will/ be there..." She got her weapons, and started cleaning them to try and pass the time, disassembling them, then reassembling. She was even more stressed than when she'd gone to sleep. "Sarah... You're not doing too good."

"Thanks for the update, Captain Obvious. No, I don't want to talk about it. I just want to simmer. So when I find him, I can beat him personally."

Nylun sighed, then transferred himself to the hologram pedestal not too far away. "Sarah... That's your father. You can't blame him for not being there, the Jiralhanae attacked a human colony! He told you in his letter he had to go but wanted to stay."

She glared at him, her eyes hard. "You keep out of my personal life, Nylun. You have no business there."

She got back to working on her weapons, then looked up when she felt the slight shift in speed. They dropped out of slipspace? She got up, and found her way to the bridge, seeing both Thel and Rtas. "Thel, Rtas, sirs... Why have we dropped out of slipspace? According to my count we've still two hours and four minutes until we reach our destination."

Thel nodded, and held up a small cylindrical device. "This is the memory core of one of our probes. We sent it ahead at twice the speed we're going, and just got it back. There's nothing there. Just the ship. Some dead Covenant, but no sign of your father nor of the construct."

Sarah froze, and opened her mouth to say something, but Thel continued. "On its way back, however, it picked up a signal originating from this planet, the same kind as your Captain received. Much fresher, considering the strength and lucidity of it. So we're going down to check this place out."

She looked out of the viewglass, and frowned. She had never seen this planet before. "Where are we?"

A computer voice spoke, instead of the Sangheili's. "_Location: ... Unknown._"

"Haven Keeper," Rtas barked, staring at the green and blue planet through the monitor, surrounded by the strange curvaceous shapes of the Sangheili language. "Where is the closest known planet? And scan the planet below for life."

... "_Closest known planet is five hundred and six trillion, two hundred and thirty billion, one million, four hundred thousand, three hundred and forty-three kilometers away, planet Quanti. Scanning... Atmosphere consists of mainly nitrogen, liquid is H2O. Foliage. Carbon-based life-form found._"

Sarah tilted her head. Carbon-based? As far as she knew, humans and creatures from Earth were the only carbon-based. "Show?"

A picture of a strange creature appeared. It looked like a giant gorilla, with an elongated snout, tusks sticking out from its bottom jaw. Four leathery wings sprouted from its back, and a long tail trailed behind it, ended in a deadly-looking blade. Grey fur covered its body. Thel growled lowly. "Haven Keeper, is a size comparison possible?"

A black silhouette of the creature appeared, marking it at fifteen feet at the shoulder when standing straight. A silhouette of a Mgalekgolo, Jiralhanae, Sangheili, and Human each appeared, showing the diminishing size.

Nuke whistled from the background, having woken when feeling the decrease in speed and made his way there. "That is a _big_ monkey..."

"_Warning: Small projectiles headed toward the Haven of Souls. Recommended destruction of projectiles or strengthening of shields on port-side of the Haven of Souls._"

"Do it!" Thel barked, and on a screen, the barrier around the ship went from a white neutral status to a green strengthened one. Afterward, they saw the projectiles. They looked much like the creature they had just looked over, but horribly mutated. There was no fur on the body, no eyes in the head, and in different ways, the wings were mangled. Some were permanently up, with only the outer half useful. On a few of them, one of the wings had joined the others, making three on one side and one on the other. On yet others, one or two wings were so mangled together they were hardly recognizable as wings. Yet, despite all the mutilations of their flight-enabling appendages, they were making their way over just fine, using their tails to steer.

"Let one in, Haven Keeper, destroy the others. I want that thing studied. We need to know what we're up against if we're going to go down and retrieve anything."

There was a pause, a moment of tension-filled silence. Then, as the first was about to strike, a portion of the shields dissipated,

letting it in. It collided with the ship, and stopped moving, floating under the shield. "_Target status: retired._"

Thel's eyes narrowed, and he let out an irritated growl, then a short, sharp huff. "No matter. Retrieve it, get it to one of the medical bays. I want to know what this thing is."

* * *

><p>Sarah and Nuke walked with Thel and Rtas, the latter species' eyes glimmering. They were on their way to the medical bays after giving the 'medics' a few hours to study the specimen. They passed many an inferior Elite, most of them giving a strange look to the human and Spartan, but they still stepped aside for them.<p>

When the med bay doors slid open, they were smacked in the face with the smell of very rotten meat. The Sangheili growled softly in disgust, and at first the medics look startled, then a little calmer when they realized the reason for the growl. "Shipmaster, Supreme Commander," a gruff-looking creature huffed, its one eye a milky white.

"What have you found?" Shipmaster Rtas inquired, his mandibles shut tight to try and help block the stench.

A younger Sangheili stepped forward. He was obviously the one that had been actually working, seeing as his forearms were covered in mushy green-brown guck. "***These creatures are technically no longer alive, which helps explain the... odor. Most of the internal organs are either no longer used or mutated for a higher purpose - lungs are used as wombs, of a sort; stomach used for both eating and for developing a capsule of acidic vomit used as a weapon. The heart is almost non-existent. The muscles in the limbs are twice as dense and strong. Oxygen is no longer needed to continue survival, which explains why they were able to attack us all the way up here**."*****

The superior Elites nodded, listening to the native Sangheili language, while Sarah and Lucas heard the choppy translated version. "***How easy will it be to dispatch these creatures?***"

"**Oh, very! A bullet or plasma blast to the head - since the brain is still very much active - or a well-placed grenade will put the creatures out of their misery.**"

Sarah nodded, glad they'd brought plenty of ammo. Unless this planet was inhabited by nothing but these monstrosities, they should be okay. "You said... The lungs are used as wombs? For what?"

The Elite pulled over a little creature, still 'alive' but restrained. It looked like the prehistoric Tyrannosaurus Rex in Earth's history, only it had no little forelimbs nor eyes, only very muscled legs and _very_ muscled jaws. "***These develop and spawn these... things. Quite fast. The only way we caught it was by luring it, but even then we almost didn't get it. They're very smart. The other three perished, but they seem to work in packs. And work very well.**"

"How strong are those chompers of its?" Lucas asked, coming over and looking at it, jerking back when it swung its head closer to

him.

"**We have yet to test...**"

"**Test it now, then,**" Thel grumbled, watching with an emotionless face.

The younger being nodded, then looked around, finally grabbing a broken plasma rifle that he had been messing with. He carefully unstrapped the monstrosity's head, then waved the rifle in front of it. In a grey-green blur, it snapped its jaws shut on the bottom storage cell, ripping a good sized chunk of it off as if it was nothing. It then proceeded to eat the metal, actually chewing it into a small compact piece.

Lucas swallowed somewhat hard at seeing that. "Does it eat metal? Or does it eat whatever it can get its jaws around?"

The older Elite looked at him with his good eye, then went to the back of the room, to some covered cages that occasionally emitted squeaks. He uncovered one, and pulled out a mole-looking rodent with some scary teeth and claws, holding it by the long mouse-like tail. It squeaked and struggled as it brought it over, holding it in front of the creature. Faster than with the rifle, it located and grabbed its prey, then started shaking its head to tear the squealing animal apart, having trouble separating the meat and other stretchy bits.

Lucas watched with a squeamish face. But he kept himself under control. "I'll take that as a 'whatever it can get'..."

The youngest in the room nodded, and reached to restrain the creature's mouth, then exclaimed in surprise and pain when its jaws were suddenly clamped around his wrist, ripping and tearing with pointed carapace and teeth, stabbing with something like a tongue. It finally got his hand off, and the Elite continued screaming as his arm started changing starting at the stump - morphing and sloughing off and turning that ugly grey-green. Thel acted fast, and drew his energy blade, slicing the medic's arm off at the elbow above the mutation, stopping it. He then turned to stab the monstrosity in the head, but the older medic grabbed his arm, holding it up with seemingly no effort. "No, Supreme Commander... we still need to study it!"

Rtas looked at the aging member of his race, at first incredulously, but then with understanding. "We now know this is but an infection, a plague... and how it is transmitted from infected to others. Perhaps by studying this more we can learn what exactly it is, and perhaps develop an immunity or cure."

Thel stared at the creature angrily for a little bit, then sighed and nodded, sheathing the energy blade. He himself then slammed the creature's head down and restrained it, brown eyes still flashing. He turned and walked out, grumbling, "It's like the Flood all over again," as he left.

Rtas looked at the Elite that had just lost his arm. He was staring at the cauterized stump in shock. He touched his shoulder gently, looking at it, then tilting his head a little comfortingly. "We will get a replacement. I am sorry you had to lose it. No honor was lost,

however - honor was gained in sacrificing to research."

That seemed to make him look a little less traumatized over the loss of his limb. He nodded and huffed softly, then got back to work on the other creature using his good arm. Rtas walked past, motioning to Sarah and Lucas to follow. "If that planet is suffering an epidemic of this Plague, your father might be in more trouble than I thought."

* * *

><p>*"**Dialogue in Bold**" - spoken in foreign language, understood via in-suit translation system

End
file.